

## **ACCREDITATION POLICIES OF THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION**

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### **1.0 ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY**

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#### **1.1 MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMISSION ON SCHOOL ACCREDITATION**

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The Commission is composed of fifteen (15) members, with three representatives from each of the five Congressional Districts as established at the time the Commission was authorized by MS Code 37-17-3. The membership consists of two classroom teachers, two principals of schools, two school district superintendents, two local school board members, and seven individuals who are not actively engaged in the education profession. All appointments to the Commission shall comply with Section 37-17-3, *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended.

#### **1.2 APPOINTMENT**

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Each member of the Commission is appointed by the State Board upon recommendation of the State Superintendent of Education.

#### **1.3 TERMS OF OFFICE**

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The length of a regular term is four years. Upon acceptance of appointment, each member is eligible to serve for two consecutive terms. If a member changes employment or accepts a position that is no longer reflective of the category for which he or she was appointed, or if a member moves out of the Congressional district he or she was appointed to represent, that member must resign and a new member will be appointed to fill the unexpired term. A member of the Commission who is appointed to fill an unexpired term is eligible for appointment to his or her own term of office.

#### **1.4 GENERAL DUTIES OF COMMISSION**

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The State Board of Education, acting through the Commission on School Accreditation, shall establish and implement a permanent performance-based accreditation system, and all public elementary and secondary schools shall be accredited under this system. It shall be the purpose of the Commission on School Accreditation to continually review and enforce the standards on accreditation and to make recommendations to the State Board of Education.

#### **1.5 OFFICERS**

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The Commission annually elects a chairperson and vice-chairperson.

#### **1.6 MEETINGS**

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The Commission meets on call of the State Superintendent of Education. Any official action taken by the Commission requires the presence of a quorum, which is defined as a majority of the present membership. Superintendents of school districts will receive written notice of the place, time, and date of each Commission meeting. Individuals and/or groups who request a time slot on the agenda are required to submit such in writing to the executive secretary. All requests for agenda consideration must be received by the executive secretary no later than seven days prior to the meeting of the Commission. Agenda items received after this deadline may be added if approved by a majority vote of the Commission.

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**1.7      *EXPENSES***

According to Sections 25-3-41 and 25-3-69, *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended, each member of the Commission is reimbursed for per diem, travel, and other allowable expenses that are incurred when attending meetings of the Commission. The expenses are paid out of any funds available for the operation of the Mississippi Department of Education.

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**1.8      *STAFF***

Staff assigned to the Commission consists of personnel in the Mississippi Department of Education. The State Superintendent of Education designates one staff member to serve as executive secretary.

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**2.0      *DISTRICT ACCREDITATION POLICY***

The State Board of Education, acting through the Commission on School Accreditation, is required to establish and implement a process for accountability at the public school district level. School districts are held accountable for Accreditation Policies and Process Standards and receive an annual Accreditation Status. Standards of the performance-based accreditation system recommended by the Commission and adopted by the State Board of Education are contained in the current edition of *Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards*.

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**2.1      *ASSIGNMENT OF DISTRICT ACCREDITATION STATUSES***

The Commission on School Accreditation determines the annual accreditation status of all public school districts in the fall of each school year based on verified accreditation data from the previous school year. An annual district accreditation status is assigned based on compliance with Process Standards. Information concerning district compliance with Process Standards is reported to the Commission on an annual basis. (See Policy 2.2.)

The district superintendent and school principals are responsible for ensuring that all data reported to the Mississippi Department of Education are true and accurate as verified by supporting documentation on file in the school district. Reporting false information is a violation of the accreditation requirements set forth by the State Board of Education and may result in the downgrading of the district's accreditation status.

After the Commission takes action on accreditation records presented, the district superintendent and chairperson of the local school board are notified of the status assigned. The decision of the Commission is final unless appealed by the school board of the school district to the State Board of Education in accordance with the appeal procedures in Policy 6.4 of this document.

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**2.2      *PROCESS STANDARDS***

Process (input) Standards address accepted educational principles and practices that are believed to promote educational quality. Any verified violation of a process standard is noted on the record of a school district at the time of discovery within any school year, but does not affect the current accreditation status of the district. (See Policy 2.5 for exceptions.) If a noted violation of a process standard has not been corrected by the following school year when accreditation statuses are assigned, the violation is reported to the Commission for appropriate action.

The State Board of Education, acting through the Commission on School Accreditation, reserves the right to suspend school district compliance of any accreditation process standard that is not directly mandated by state or federal law. (See Policy 4.2 for Rewards.)

## **2.3 ANNUAL ACCREDITATION STATUSES**

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In the fall of each year, every public school district will be assigned an annual accreditation status based on compliance with Process Standards and Accreditation Policies.

**ACCREDITED** is assigned to a district that complies with Accreditation Policies and 100% of the Process Standards (See exceptions in Appendices F and H).

**PROBATION** is assigned to a district that complies with less than 100% of the Accreditation Policies and Process Standards. The district will be required to develop and implement a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) with defined timelines to address the deficiencies. (See Policy 2.8.)

**WITHDRAWN** is assigned to a district that has previously been assigned a **Probation** status and still does not comply with its Corrective Action Plan (CAP). Any school district placed in conservatorship will have its accreditation withdrawn. The district will be required to develop and implement a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) with defined timelines to address the deficiencies. (See Policy 2.8.)

## **2.4 NOTIFICATION OF DEFICIENCIES AFTER ASSIGNMENT OF STATUS**

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After the annual assignment of a district's accreditation status, the process of determining statuses for the following school year begins. When information on file in the Mississippi Department of Education indicates that a school district may be in violation of a standard, the superintendent and the school board of the district are informed in writing by appropriate staff in the Department responsible for monitoring compliance with the standard. School district officials are given thirty (30) days from the date of receipt of notification to provide a written response verifying accuracy or inaccuracy of the notice of possible noncompliance with the standard.

If the written response includes appropriate evidence to correct or refute the alleged violation, the superintendent of the district is notified by appropriate staff in the Department responsible for monitoring compliance with the standard. Any verified violation of a standard is reported in writing to the Office of Accreditation, where it is noted on the current Accreditation Record Summary of the district. (See Glossary for definition of Accreditation Record Summary.) The appropriate staff member in the Office of Accreditation notifies the superintendent of the district in writing of the verified violation.

## **2.5 FACTORS THAT MAY AFFECT AN IMMEDIATE CHANGE IN ACCREDITATION STATUS**

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An assigned accreditation status may remain unchanged during that school year except in those cases where verified noncompliance of accreditation standards may downgrade an accreditation status immediately.

### **2.5.1 Recommended Accreditation Status - PROBATION**

Districts in violation of any of the following standards will be presented to the Commission on School Accreditation for action. That action may include downgrading the district's accreditation status to Probation.

- Accreditation Policy 2.1, reporting false information, Process Standards 1 & 3, failure to implement appropriate standards of governance
- Standard 2, failure to comply with school board policies that meet state and federal statutes, rules and regulations,
- Standards 10 and 11, failure to comply with financial accountability requirements,
- Standard 20, failure to comply with graduation requirements,

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- Standard 22, failure to comply with test security procedures required by the Mississippi Statewide Assessment System,
- Standards 23.1-23.8, failure to comply with state/federal regulations, or
- Standards 35, 36, and 37.1, failure to comply with standards that sustain a safe school climate.

#### **2.5.2 Recommended Accreditation Status - WITHDRAWN**

Districts in violation of any of the following standards will be presented to the Commission on School Accreditation for action. That action may include downgrading the district's accreditation status to Withdrawn.

- Standards 1 & 3, failure to implement appropriate standards of governance,
- Standard 2, failure to comply with school board policies that meet state and federal statutes, rules and regulations,
- Standards 10 and 11, failure to comply with financial accountability requirements of a serious nature,
- Standard 20, failure to comply with graduation requirements specified in Standards 20.1, 20.2, & 20.4,
- Standard 22, failure to comply with test security procedures required by the Mississippi Statewide Assessment System in Appendix F, numbers 8 & 9,
- Standards 23.3-23.5, federal programs whose regulations call for strong sanctions for continued patterns of noncompliance, or
- Standards 35, 36, and 37.1, failure to comply with standards that pose life-threatening conditions for students and staff.

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#### **2.6 CONSOLIDATION OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS OR TRANSFER OF GRADES**

When two or more school districts consolidate or when two or more school boards approve the transfer of a grade or grades, the affected school district(s) may be allowed to maintain its accreditation status for a period of time to be determined upon application to the Commission on School Accreditation. The Commission on School Accreditation shall review the application of any such affected school district(s) and submit a recommendation to the State Board of Education for approval.

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#### **2.7 CORRECTIVE ACTION PLAN (CAP) AND WITHDRAWAL OF ACCREDITATION**

##### **2.7.1 Corrective Action Plan (CAP) with Definitive Timelines**

When a school district has been assigned a, PROBATION, or WITHDRAWN accreditation status, the Mississippi Department of Education, in conjunction with the school district, shall develop a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) with defined timelines in which to correct the district's deficiencies. The State Board of Education implements the program of development in each district assigned a PROBATION or WITHDRAWN status in accordance with Section 37-17-6(10), *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended.

The school district is required to submit a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) within sixty (60) days. The plan must stipulate what will be done to remove the deficiencies and the time line required. The plan must be approved by the local school board as documented by official minutes and bear the signatures of the school board chairperson and district superintendent. When corrective action has been implemented to remove a citation, the school district must submit documentary evidence confirming such to the Office of Accreditation. Assigned MDE staff may conduct follow-up visits as necessary to verify corrective action and compliance.

##### **2.7.2 Withdrawal of Accreditation**

If the district's deficiencies are not removed during the time specified in the Corrective Action Plan (CAP), the school district is subject to having its accredited status withdrawn by the Commission on

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School Accreditation in accordance with MS Code 37-17-6. The status of the district will be listed as **WITHDRAWN NOT ACCREDITED**, and the record of that district will continue to be maintained.

**2.7.2.1 Hearings**

Before requesting approval from the State Board of Education to withdraw the accredited status of a district, the **Commission on School Accreditation** conducts a hearing (See Policy 2.9 for exception.) to allow the officials of the affected district to present evidence or other reasons as to why its accreditation should not be withdrawn. {MS Code 37-17-6(11) (a)}

**2.7.2.2 Results of Hearings**

Within forty-five (45) calendar days of the conclusion of the hearing and after consideration of the results of the hearing, the Commission on School Accreditation shall be authorized, with the approval of the State Board of Education, to withdraw the accreditation of the district and may issue a request to the Governor that a state of emergency be declared in that district in accordance with Section 37-17-6(11)(a), *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended. If the decision is made not to withdraw the accredited status of the district, a new timeline is established in the district's Corrective Action Plan (CAP).

**2.7.2.3 Public Notice**

After a state of emergency has been declared, the Commission files a public notice at least once a week for at least three consecutive weeks in a newspaper published within the immediate or general vicinity of the affected school district in accordance with Section 37-17-6(12), *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended.

**2.8.2.4 Access to School District Records**

School districts are required to produce necessary reports, correspondence, financial statements, and any other documents necessary for the Commission to implement this section on withdrawal of accreditation and conservatorship.

**2.7.2.5 Reinstatement of an Accredited Status**

Based on the recommendation from the Office of Accreditation or the State Superintendent of Education, the superintendent and school board president of a school district whose accreditation has been withdrawn may file a petition with the Commission on School Accreditation for reinstatement of accreditation to be effective on January 1 or July 1. The Commission on School Accreditation shall require all school districts that petition for reinstatement of accreditation to appear before the Commission on School Accreditation to furnish evidence satisfactory to the Commission that the school district is in compliance with all accreditation standards prior to the reinstatement of accreditation.

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**2.8 CONDITIONS OF EMERGENCY STATUS AND WITHDRAWAL OF ACCREDITATION**

**2.8.1 Declaration of State of Emergency**

**The State Board of Education may request the Governor to declare a state of emergency in any school district when any of the following emergency situations occur. Upon the declaration of the state of emergency by the Governor, the State Board of Education may take all such action for dealing with the school district as is authorized under subsection (11) or (14) of Section 37-17-6, Mississippi Code of 1972, as amended, including the withdrawal of the district's accreditation.**

#### ***2.8.1.1 Emergency Situation***

The State Board of Education and the Commission on School Accreditation determine that an extreme emergency situation exists in a school district which jeopardizes the safety, security or educational interests of the children enrolled in the schools in that district and such emergency situation is believed to be related to a serious violation or violations of accreditation standards or state or federal law. For purposes of this paragraph, the declarations of a state of emergency shall not be limited to those instances when a school district's impairments are related to a lack of financial resources, but also shall include serious failure to meet minimum academic standards, as evidenced by a continued pattern of poor student performance. (Section 37-17-6(11)(b), *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended)

#### ***2.8.1.2 Failing School District***

A school district meets the State Board of Education's definition of a failing school district for two (2) consecutive full school years. (Section 37-17-6(11)(b), *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended)

#### ***2.8.1.3 Schools At-Risk***

A school continues to be designated a School At-Risk after three (3) years of implementing a school improvement plan, or in the event that more than fifty percent (50%) of the schools within the school district are designated as Schools At-Risk in any one (1) year. (Section 37-18-7(2), *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended) (See Policy 3.4.1 for Schools At-Risk designation.)

### **2.8.2 Penalty for the Withdrawal of Accreditation**

The following is a result of the withdrawal of accreditation by the Commission on School Accreditation:

- A school or schools within a district shall be limited to participation in no more than fifty percent (50%) of the regular season of any interscholastic activity, which shall include division/district/regional games,
- The interscholastic season schedule for a school or schools within a district shall not include the opening day of season or any type of post season participation, as determined by the Office of Accreditation, and
- Cheerleading, drill, and dance squads, speech and debate, choral music and band may participate in district or state contest, but shall not be eligible to receive ratings.

All schedule requests must be submitted in writing to the Mississippi Department of Education at least thirty (30) days prior to the beginning of the season. **The Office of Accreditation shall pre-approve all schedules and participation in interscholastic activities.** In addition to the suspension of all post season activities, the school district shall not be allowed to participate in jamborees, special games, parades, tournaments, holiday tournaments, or competitions of any nature.

**Failure to comply with section 2.8.2 will result in the suspension of ALL interscholastic activities.**

**Failure of a district to have its accreditation reinstated by the Commission on School Accreditation after a period of two (2) calendar years from the date of the withdrawal of accreditation, shall result in the immediate suspension of ALL interscholastic activities until the district's accreditation status is reinstated.**

**Note: Interscholastic activities include, but are not limited to, football, basketball, baseball, track and field, cross country, tennis, golf, volleyball, softball (fast pitch and slow pitch), soccer, wrestling, swimming, power lifting, bowling, archery, cheerleading, drill, and dance squads, speech and debate, choral music, and band.**

**2.8.3. Public Notice**

After a state of emergency has been declared, the Commission files a public notice at least once a week for at least three consecutive weeks in a newspaper published within the immediate or general vicinity of the affected school district in accordance with Section 37-17-6(12), *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended.

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### **3.0 PERFORMANCE CLASSIFICATION POLICY**

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The State Board of Education, acting through the Commission on School Accreditation, is required to establish and implement a process for accountability at the individual public school level and district level. Individual schools and districts are held accountable for student growth and performance and receive an annual School Performance Classification and District Performance Classification. (See Glossary for definitions of an attendance center and school.)

When the district establishes a new school and/or the district reconfigures the specific grades or students assigned to an existing school(s) within the district, the student achievement data used to assign school performance classifications will follow the guidelines established in the School Performance Standards and School Performance Model.



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### **3.1      *ASSIGNMENT OF PERFORMANCE CLASSIFICATIONS***

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#### **3.1.1      School Performance Classification**

Information concerning school performance is reported to the Commission on an annual basis, and annual performance classifications will be assigned in the fall of each school year. Each public school that has both achievement and growth data will be assigned an annual performance classification. In addition, the Graduation Rate and the High School Completion Index (HSCI) will be included in determining the performance classification of schools with any grade configuration of 9-12. Available assessment data will be reported for those schools that do not have both achievement and growth data, but a school performance classification will not be assigned. An alternative school will not be assigned a school performance classification. (See State Board Policy 901 and 902 and the Glossary for definition of alternative school.)

#### **3.1.2      District Performance Classification**

Information concerning district performance is reported to the Commission on an annual basis, and annual performance classifications will be assigned in the fall of each school year. Each public school district will be assigned an annual performance classification based on achievement, growth, and graduation rate or High School Completion Index. A district performance level is assigned based on the performance of all students in the district i.e., the district will be treated as one K-12 school.

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### **3.2      *PERFORMANCE STANDARDS***

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Performance (output or product) standards address selected components of the statewide testing program and other outcome measures related to the performance of a school. (See Performance Standards) The State Board of Education may also take into account such factors as graduation rates, dropout rates, completion rates, the extent to which the school or district employs qualified teachers in every classroom, and any other factors deemed appropriate by the State Board of Education.

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### **3.3      *PERFORMANCE CLASSIFICATIONS***

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The performance classification assigned to a school or district will be determined by (a) the percentage of students who are performing at criterion levels (minimum, basic, proficient, and advanced) and (b) the degree to which student performance has improved over time (based on an expected growth value for the school). The results from the Achievement Model and the Growth Model are combined to assign performance classification as follows:

**Star School**  
**High Performing**  
**Successful**  
**Academic Watch**  
**Low Performing School**  
**At-Risk of Failing**  
**Failing**

(See State Accountability Rating System and Performance Classification Model)

A school will not receive a school performance classification if the test data have been invalidated, and the school performance classification will be noted as Test Data Invalidated. (See Appendix F.)



### **3.4 SCHOOLS AT-RISK**

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Following an analysis of school data each year, the Mississippi Department of Education shall identify those schools that are deficient in educating students and are in need of improvement in accordance with Section 37-18-3, *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended. This analysis shall indicate individual school performance in two areas: (a) meeting its assigned yearly growth expectation and (b) percentage of the students in the school that are proficient.

#### **3.4.1 Designation**

A school shall be identified as a School At-Risk and in need of assistance if the school:

- (a) does not meet its growth expectation and has a percentage of students functioning below grade level, as designated by the State Board of Education;
- (b) is designated as a Failing School; or
- (c) is designated as Low Performing or At-Risk of Failing for two (2) consecutive years.

#### **3.4.2 Notification**

Within fifteen (15) days after a School At-Risk has been identified, written notice shall be sent by the State Board of Education by certified mail to the school principal, the superintendent, and the chairperson of the local board of education.

#### **3.4.3 Evaluation Teams and Evaluation Report**

Within fifteen (15) days after notification, the State Board of Education shall assign an evaluation team to the school, subject to the availability of funding. The evaluation team shall be independent of the school being evaluated and may include employees of the State Department of Education. The team may include retired educators who have met certain standards and have completed all necessary training.

The evaluation team shall analyze the School At-Risk's data to determine probable areas of weakness before conducting an on-site audit. After completing the evaluation of the School At-Risk, the team shall prepare and adopt its school evaluation report, which shall be submitted to the State Superintendent of Education for approval within ninety (90) calendar days. The evaluation report shall identify any personnel who were found by the evaluation team to be in need of improvement and need to participate in a professional development plan. Evaluation instruments used to evaluate teachers, principals, superintendents or any other certified or classified personnel will be instruments that have been validated for such purposes.

**Following the State Superintendent's approval of the report, a representative of the State Superintendent and the evaluation team leader shall present the report to the principal of the School At-Risk, the school district superintendent, and school board members of the local school district. Following this presentation, the evaluation report shall be presented to the community served by the School At-Risk at an advertised public meeting.**

#### **3.4.4 School Improvement Plan**

Based on the findings of the evaluation report and the results of the public meeting, the Mississippi Department of Education and evaluation team leader shall assist the school principal and other local school officials in the development of a school improvement plan.

The school improvement plan shall be developed and approved by the principal of the School At-Risk, the superintendent of the local school district, the local school board, and a majority of the

teachers of the school. If the plan is not approved, the State Board of Education may approve and implement the plan in the school.

The State Department of Education shall provide technical assistance and shall assist in identifying funding to the School At-Risk in the implementation of the school improvement plan, including the implementation of any recommended professional development plan, and the department may contract with the institutions of higher learning to provide such technical assistance. The assistance team shall collaborate with school and school district employees in the implementation and monitoring of the school improvement plan and the State Department of Education shall ensure that a report is issued monthly to the local school board and the local community-based advisory council.

A school district that has been designated as failing as defined by the State Board of Education or a district and/or a school designated below the successful level shall establish a community-based prekindergarten through higher education (P-16) council comprised of a broad spectrum of the community, including economic developers, elected officials, civic leaders, business leaders, faith-based leaders, social services, nonprofit organizations, school attendance officers, law enforcement officials, health department officials, day care providers, librarians, parents and others with the knowledge and resources that can be leveraged to build strong communities. The State Board of Education shall develop procedures for appointments to the council, which shall not be appointed solely by the school board. The council will serve as a community-led group that is inclusive, accountable and required to publicly report progress to the community as a whole.

### **3.4.5 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR EDUCATORS**

As part of the school improvement plan for a School At-Risk, a professional development plan shall be prepared for those school administrators, teachers, or other employees who are identified by the evaluation team as needing improvement.

## **4.0 RECOGNITION AND REWARDS**

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The State Board of Education shall provide special recognition and/or rewards to individual schools or school districts meeting the highest levels of accreditation standards as defined by the State Board of Education. A school or district with a QDI in the top two ranges will be identified as meeting the highest level of accreditation standards.

### **4.1 RECOGNITION**

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Special recognition will be provided to all schools meeting the highest levels of accreditation standards. Examples of recognition include, but are not limited to the following:

- Public announcements and events;
- Special recognition of student progress and effort;
- Certificates of recognition and plaques for teachers, principals, superintendents, support and classified personnel and parents; and
- Media announcements utilizing the services of the Mississippi Educational Television.

### **4.2 REWARDS**

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Rewards may be provided for schools and school districts assigned the highest levels of performance as defined by the State Board of Education as follows:

#### **4.2.1 Exemptions for Schools Meeting the Highest Levels of Performance.**

Schools Meeting the Highest Levels of Performance may be exempted from citations of noncompliance with the Process Standards listed below. For specific details, refer to each process standard referenced below.

- Library Media/Organized Collection (Standard 24.1)
- Library Media Program of Service (Standard 24.2)
- High School Science Laboratory (Standard 25)
- Limit on Course Preparations (Standard 31)
  
- Student Teacher Ratios in Grades 1-4 (Standard 34.2)
- Limit of 150 Students Per Teacher in Academic Core Subjects (Standard 34.5)

#### **4.2.2 Exemptions for Districts Meeting the Highest Levels of Performance.**

School districts assigned the Highest Levels of Performance may be exempted from citations of noncompliance with the Process Standards listed below. For specific details, refer to each process standard referenced below.

- Community Involvement, Parental Communication, and Business Partnerships (Standard 18)
- Senior Preparation for Graduation Ceremonies (Standard 19.5)
- Summer School Program Requirements (Standard 19.6)
- Professional Development Plan/Program (Standard 21)
- Early Childhood Programs (kindergarten and teacher assistant) (Standard 23.1)
  
- Instructional Management System (Standard 27.1)
- Suggested Teaching Strategies, Resources, and Assessment Strategies (Standard 27.2)

#### **4.2.3 Financial Rewards**

If funds are appropriated by the legislature, Schools Meeting the Highest Levels of Performance may apply to the State Board of Education for monetary incentives to be used for selected school needs, as identified by a vote of all licensed and instructional personnel employed at the school. These incentive funds may be used for specific needs, including, but not limited to the following:

- Funding for professional development activities; staff participating in such activities will report to the school and school district about the benefits and lessons learned from such training;
- Technology needs;
- Sabbaticals for teachers or administrators, or both, to pursue additional professional development or educational enrichment;
- Paid professional leave; and
- Training for parents, including, but not limited to, curriculum, Title I, special need students, student rights and responsibility, school and community relations, and effective parenting.

## **5.0 ACCREDITATION MONITORING PROCEDURES**

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Staff in the Mississippi Department of Education continuously monitor school districts to verify compliance with applicable accreditation requirements and state and federal laws.

## **5.1 ON-SITE EVALUATIONS**

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The State Board of Education, the State Superintendent of Education, or the Commission on School Accreditation have the authority to call for an on-site evaluation or investigation of a school district at any time. If deficiencies are found in meeting accreditation standards or state and federal laws, the superintendent is notified in writing and given thirty (30) days from the receipt of notification to provide a written response. The report of findings is filed in the current accreditation records in the Office of Accreditation.

## **5.2 INVESTIGATIVE EVALUATIONS (COMPLAINTS AGAINST DISTRICTS)**

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All formal complaints made against schools or districts must be submitted to the Office of Accreditation in writing and bear the signature of the individual(s) filing the complaint. The written complaint shall contain specific details concerning alleged violations. When the complaint is received, the superintendent is notified in writing of the nature of the complaint and informed that the district is subject to an unannounced audit to investigate the allegations.

### **5.2.1 Areas Over Which the Commission Has No Authority**

If the complaint addresses an area over which the Commission has no authority, the individual filing the complaint is acknowledged and the complaint is filed in the Office of Accreditation.

### **5.2.2 Areas Over Which the Commission Does Have Authority**

If the complaint addresses an area over which the Commission does have authority, the superintendent may be notified in writing of the nature of the complaint and given 30 days to provide a written response to the allegations and to present documentation of compliance. The superintendent may also be notified that the district is subject to an unannounced audit to investigate the allegations.

**5.2.1.1** If deficiencies are found in meeting accreditation standards or state and federal laws, a report of findings is filed in the current accreditation records in the Office of Accreditation and the complainant will be notified of the findings.

**5.2.1.2** If no deficiencies are found in meeting accreditation standards or state and federal laws, the district and the complainant will be notified.

### **5.2.3 Unannounced On-Site Investigative Evaluations**

The State Board of Education, the State Superintendent of Education, or the Commission on School Accreditation have the authority to call for an on-site evaluation or investigation of a school district at any time. Procedures for conducting investigative audits are as follows:

**5.2.3.1** The auditors may arrive in the district without prior notification.

**5.2.3.2** The auditor(s) inform the superintendent of the purpose of the audit and of the procedures to be followed.

**5.2.3.3** The auditor(s) discuss procedures with the principal of the school if appropriate.

- 5.2.3.4** The auditor(s) use various methods to collect the data needed to verify or discredit the complaint, including examination of official records, interviews with school personnel, and observations.
- 5.2.3.5** Upon completion of the audit, the auditor(s) compile a written report that is sent to the superintendent, the chairman of the school board, and the Commission on School Accreditation.

### **5.3 SPECIAL TEST AUDITS**

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Reports regarding potential testing irregularities or test security violations are referred to the Office of Student Assessment. Such reports include statistical analyses of test data conducted after each test administration, self-reported incidents, third-party allegations regarding violations of testing requirements, and irregularities noted during test security audits. Regular test security audits may be conducted prior to, during, and following each test administration in order to promote the integrity and security of the Mississippi Assessment System. The Office of Student Assessment will report to the Office of Accreditation each testing irregularity that has been verified as a violation of a testing requirement.

- 5.3.1** Self-reports or third-party allegations regarding testing irregularities may be either formal written reports (signed or unsigned) or verbal reports or complaints that may be made officially or anonymously and with or without documentary evidence.
- 5.3.2** If a third-party allegation addresses an area over which the State Board of Education has no authority, the individual filing the allegation will be notified.
- 5.3.3** A self-report or allegation must identify specific details concerning alleged violations of test security and/or testing irregularities in order to warrant an investigative audit.
- 5.3.4** Any statistical analysis that indicates a potential testing irregularity or test security violation will be reviewed and evaluated by staff in the Office of Student Assessment. If the review and evaluation of the statistical analysis indicate that further information is required in order to resolve or confirm the testing irregularity, the Office of Student Assessment may require that a school district investigate the potential irregularity and report its findings to the Office of Student Assessment. Any verified testing irregularity is reported to the Office of Accreditation for appropriate action.
- 5.3.5** Procedures for test security audits are as follows:
  - 5.3.5.1** The auditor may arrive at the school without prior notification.
  - 5.3.5.2** The auditor informs the school administrator of the purpose of the audit and of the procedures to be followed.
  - 5.3.5.3** The auditor requests that the superintendent be notified that a test audit is in progress.
  - 5.3.5.4** The auditor uses the same methods to collect data as described in policy.
  - 5.3.5.5** The auditor reports the audit findings to the Office of Student Assessment. If the audit findings indicate that a testing irregularity has occurred, the Office of Student Assessment will notify the district superintendent. If the response from the superintendent does not

resolve the irregularity, the irregularity is reported to the Office of Accreditation for appropriate action.

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#### **5.4 SUMMER PROGRAM AUDITS**

Each school district providing educational programs during the summer is required to report summer program data, including types of instructional programs provided, staffing, and enrollment. School districts offering summer programs may be audited to verify information contained in the annual Summer School/Extended Year Report.

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#### **5.5 OTHER STATE/FEDERAL PROGRAM AUDITS/EVALUATIONS**

When audits or evaluations of other state or federal programs reveal verified noncompliance with state or federal program regulations, the incidents of noncompliance are filed with the Office of Accreditation.

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#### **5.6 ANALYSIS AND VERIFICATION OF ACCREDITATION INFORMATION**

Accreditation staff in the Mississippi Department of Education review annual personnel/accreditation information and other annual reports submitted by school districts. Staff will analyze and compare this information with any other accreditation data on record and notify responsible officials of any inconsistency in reporting or any apparent deficiency in meeting standards. Any information submitted by a school district may be verified through on-site visits. Upon request the school district must provide documentation necessary to validate compliance with accreditation requirements.

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### **6.0 HEARING AND APPEAL PROCEDURES**

All controversies involving the accreditation of schools or school districts are initially heard by a duly authorized representative of the Commission on School Accreditation before whom a complete record is made.

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#### **6.1 REQUEST FOR HEARING**

The school board of a school district may request a hearing by filing written notice with the executive secretary of the Commission on School Accreditation within ten (10) calendar days of the written notification of the recommended Commission action.

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#### **6.2 AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE OF THE COMMISSION**

Upon receipt of the written request for hearing, the chairman of the Commission assigns, in writing, a duly authorized representative previously appointed by the Commission to hear the controversy.

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#### **6.3 HEARING PROCEDURES**

**6.3.1** The Commission's representative sets the time, place, and date for a hearing and notifies all parties of the time, place, and date of the hearing by registered or certified mail, return receipt requested. All parties may be represented by counsel at the expense of the party. The hearing is conducted in such a manner as to afford all parties a fair and reasonable opportunity to present witnesses and other evidence pertinent to the issues and to cross-examine witnesses presented by the opposing party. The Commission's representative may permit any portion of the evidence to be submitted in the form of depositions or affidavits; and in case affidavits are received, an opportunity to present counter-affidavits is provided.

**6.3.2** It is the responsibility of each party at the hearing to secure the attendance of such witness or witnesses as the party deems necessary or appropriate, and any expense connected with the attendance of such witnesses is borne by the party responsible for the attendance of the witness.



**6.3.3** In conducting the hearing, the Commission's representative is not bound by common law or by statutory rules of evidence or by technical or formal rules of procedure, provided, however, hearsay evidence, if admitted, is not the sole basis for the determination of facts by the Commission's representative.

**6.3.4** After presentation by the executive secretary of the Commission regarding recommended action and policy in support thereof, the party filing the written notice of hearing has the burden of going forward with the evidence, and at the conclusion of the hearing, the Commission's representative grants any party the opportunity to present a statement in such party's own behalf, either in person or by such party's attorney.

**6.3.5** All hearings held before the Commission's representative are recorded and transcribed by a court reporter whose fees and costs of transcription are paid by the school district involved within forty-five (45) days after having been notified of such costs and fees by the Commission. Within thirty (30) calendar days of receipt of the transcribed record of the hearing, the Commission's representative files a written recommendation to the Commission as to the resolution of the controversies. Upon consideration of the transcribed record and recommendation of its representative, the Commission makes its decision and notifies all parties in writing by certified or registered mail, return receipt requested. The decision of the Commission is final unless the school board of the school district involved elects to appeal to the State Board of Education. The school board of the school district may appeal to the State Board of Education by filing a written notice of appeal with the State Superintendent of Education within fifteen (15) calendar days of receipt of the decision of the Commission on School Accreditation.

#### **6.4 APPEAL PROCEDURES**

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**6.4.1** An appeal to the State Board of Education is on the record previously made before the Commission's representative or the Commission. Upon written application, the State Board of Education may consider new factual evidence.

**6.4.2** Upon receipt of the transcript, the State Board of Education, through the State Superintendent of Education, notifies the parties involved that the transcript has been filed and that the appealing party has fifteen (15) calendar days to file any written argument not to exceed twenty-five (25) pages in length. The Commission is allowed thirty (30) calendar days from the filing of the transcript with the State Board of Education to file a responsive written argument not to exceed twenty-five (25) pages in length. Any written argument in rebuttal by the appealing party must be filed within forty (40) calendar days of the filing of the transcript. The appealing party may not exceed twenty-five (25) pages as the combined total for its original and rebuttal arguments. An original and nine (9) copies of the written argument must be provided. The State Board of Education considers all appeals within thirty (30) calendar days of the last written argument filed. The written decision of the State Board of Education is transmitted to the parties involved within fifteen (15) calendar days of its decision.

### **7.0 ANNUAL REPORT**

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By November 1 of each year, each local school district shall be required to develop and publish an annual report as prescribed by the State Board of Education (SBE). The report shall be published in a newspaper having general circulation in the county and posted on the school district's web site in a printable format. The public notice shall include information on the report's availability on the district's web site, with the web site address, and the location(s) in the school district where a copy of the report can be obtained. SBE Policy 2051



## **ACCREDITATION POLICIES OF THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION**

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### **1.0 ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY**

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#### **1.1 MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMISSION ON SCHOOL ACCREDITATION**

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The Commission is composed of fifteen (15) members, with three representatives from each of the five Congressional Districts as established at the time the Commission was authorized by MS Code 37-17-3. The membership consists of two classroom teachers, two principals of schools, two school district superintendents, two local school board members, and seven individuals who are not actively engaged in the education profession. All appointments to the Commission shall comply with Section 37-17-3, *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended.

#### **1.2 APPOINTMENT**

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Each member of the Commission is appointed by the State Board upon recommendation of the State Superintendent of Education.

#### **1.3 TERMS OF OFFICE**

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The length of a regular term is four years. Upon acceptance of appointment, each member is eligible to serve for two consecutive terms. If a member changes employment or accepts a position that is no longer reflective of the category for which he or she was appointed, or if a member moves out of the Congressional district he or she was appointed to represent, that member must resign and a new member will be appointed to fill the unexpired term. A member of the Commission who is appointed to fill an unexpired term is eligible for appointment to his or her own term of office.

#### **1.4 GENERAL DUTIES OF COMMISSION**

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The State Board of Education, acting through the Commission on School Accreditation, shall establish and implement a permanent performance-based accreditation system, and all public elementary and secondary schools shall be accredited under this system. It shall be the purpose of the Commission on School Accreditation to continually review and enforce the standards on accreditation and to make recommendations to the State Board of Education.

#### **1.5 OFFICERS**

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The Commission annually elects a chairperson and vice-chairperson.

#### **1.6 MEETINGS**

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The Commission meets on call of the State Superintendent of Education. Any official action taken by the Commission requires the presence of a quorum, which is defined as a majority of the present membership. Superintendents of school districts will receive written notice of the place, time, and date of each Commission meeting. Individuals and/or groups who request a time slot on the agenda are required to submit such in writing to the executive secretary. All requests for agenda consideration must be received by the executive secretary no later than seven days prior to the meeting of the Commission. Agenda items received after this deadline may be added if approved by a majority vote of the Commission.

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**1.7      *EXPENSES***

According to Sections 25-3-41 and 25-3-69, *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended, each member of the Commission is reimbursed for per diem, travel, and other allowable expenses that are incurred when attending meetings of the Commission. The expenses are paid out of any funds available for the operation of the Mississippi Department of Education.

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**1.8      *STAFF***

Staff assigned to the Commission consists of personnel in the Mississippi Department of Education. The State Superintendent of Education designates one staff member to serve as executive secretary.

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**2.0      *DISTRICT ACCREDITATION POLICY***

The State Board of Education, acting through the Commission on School Accreditation, is required to establish and implement a process for accountability at the public school district level. School districts are held accountable for Accreditation Policies and Process Standards and receive an annual Accreditation Status. Standards of the performance-based accreditation system recommended by the Commission and adopted by the State Board of Education are contained in the current edition of *Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards*.

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**2.1      *ASSIGNMENT OF DISTRICT ACCREDITATION STATUSES***

The Commission on School Accreditation determines the annual accreditation status of all public school districts in the fall of each school year based on verified accreditation data from the previous school year. An annual district accreditation status is assigned based on compliance with Process Standards. Information concerning district compliance with Process Standards is reported to the Commission on an annual basis. (See Policy 2.2.)

The district superintendent and school principals are responsible for ensuring that all data reported to the Mississippi Department of Education are true and accurate as verified by supporting documentation on file in the school district. Reporting false information is a violation of the accreditation requirements set forth by the State Board of Education and may result in the downgrading of the district's accreditation status.

After the Commission takes action on accreditation records presented, the district superintendent and chairperson of the local school board are notified of the status assigned. The decision of the Commission is final unless appealed by the school board of the school district to the State Board of Education in accordance with the appeal procedures in Policy 6.4 of this document.

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**2.2      *PROCESS STANDARDS***

Process (input) Standards address accepted educational principles and practices that are believed to promote educational quality. Any verified violation of a process standard is noted on the record of a school district at the time of discovery within any school year, but does not affect the current accreditation status of the district. (See Policy 2.5 for exceptions.) If a noted violation of a process standard has not been corrected by the following school year when accreditation statuses are assigned, the violation is reported to the Commission for appropriate action.

The State Board of Education, acting through the Commission on School Accreditation, reserves the right to suspend school district compliance of any accreditation process standard that is not directly mandated by state or federal law. (See Policy 4.2 for Rewards.)

### **2.3 ANNUAL ACCREDITATION STATUSES**

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In the fall of each year, every public school district will be assigned an annual accreditation status based on compliance with Process Standards and Accreditation Policies.

**ACCREDITED** is assigned to a district that complies with Accreditation Policies and 100% of the Process Standards (See exceptions in Appendices F and H).

**PROBATION** is assigned to a district that complies with less than 100% of the Accreditation Policies and Process Standards. The district will be required to develop and implement a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) with defined timelines to address the deficiencies. (See Policy 2.8.)

**WITHDRAWN** is assigned to a district that has previously been assigned a **Probation** status and still does not comply with its Corrective Action Plan (CAP). Any school district placed in conservatorship will have its accreditation withdrawn. The district will be required to develop and implement a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) with defined timelines to address the deficiencies. (See Policy 2.8.)

~~School districts whose accreditation has been withdrawn by the Commission on School Accreditation are prohibited from participating in all extra-curricular activities that are sanctioned by the Mississippi High School Activities Association (MHSAA) with the exception of JROTC.~~

### **2.4 NOTIFICATION OF DEFICIENCIES AFTER ASSIGNMENT OF STATUS**

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After the annual assignment of a district's accreditation status, the process of determining statuses for the following school year begins. When information on file in the Mississippi Department of Education indicates that a school district may be in violation of a standard, the superintendent and the school board of the district are informed in writing by appropriate staff in the Department responsible for monitoring compliance with the standard. School district officials are given thirty (30) days from the date of receipt of notification to provide a written response verifying accuracy or inaccuracy of the notice of possible noncompliance with the standard.

If the written response includes appropriate evidence to correct or refute the alleged violation, the superintendent of the district is notified by appropriate staff in the Department responsible for monitoring compliance with the standard. Any verified violation of a standard is reported in writing to the Office of Accreditation, where it is noted on the current Accreditation Record Summary of the district. (See Glossary for definition of Accreditation Record Summary.) The appropriate staff member in the Office of Accreditation notifies the superintendent of the district in writing of the verified violation.

### **2.5 FACTORS THAT MAY AFFECT AN IMMEDIATE CHANGE IN ACCREDITATION STATUS**

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An assigned accreditation status may remain unchanged during that school year except in those cases where verified noncompliance of accreditation standards may downgrade an accreditation status immediately.

### **2.5.1 Recommended Accreditation Status - PROBATION**

Districts in violation of any of the following standards will be presented to the Commission on School Accreditation for action. That action may include downgrading the district's accreditation status to Probation.

- Accreditation Policy 2.1, reporting false information, Process Standards 1 & 3, failure to implement appropriate standards of governance
- Standard 2, failure to comply with school board policies that meet state and federal statutes, rules and regulations,
- Standards 10 and 11, failure to comply with financial accountability requirements,
- Standard 20, failure to comply with graduation requirements,
- Standard 22, failure to comply with test security procedures required by the Mississippi Statewide Assessment System,
- Standards 23.1-23.8, failure to comply with state/federal regulations, or
- Standards 35, 36, and 37.1, failure to comply with standards that sustain a safe school climate.

### **2.5.2 Recommended Accreditation Status - WITHDRAWN**

Districts in violation of any of the following standards will be presented to the Commission on School Accreditation for action. That action may include downgrading the district's accreditation status to Withdrawn.

- Standards 1 & 3, failure to implement appropriate standards of governance,
- Standard 2, failure to comply with school board policies that meet state and federal statutes, rules and regulations,
- Standards 10 and 11, failure to comply with financial accountability requirements of a serious nature,
- Standard 20, failure to comply with graduation requirements specified in Standards 20.1, 20.2, & 20.4,
- Standard 22, failure to comply with test security procedures required by the Mississippi Statewide Assessment System in Appendix F, numbers 8 & 9,
- Standards 23.3-23.5, federal programs whose regulations call for strong sanctions for continued patterns of noncompliance, or
- Standards 35, 36, and 37.1, failure to comply with standards that pose life-threatening conditions for students and staff.

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## **2.6 CONSOLIDATION OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS OR TRANSFER OF GRADES**

When two or more school districts consolidate or when two or more school boards approve the transfer of a grade or grades, the affected school district(s) may be allowed to maintain its accreditation status for a period of time to be determined upon application to the Commission on School Accreditation. The Commission on School Accreditation shall review the application of any such affected school district(s) and submit a recommendation to the State Board of Education for approval.

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## **2.7 CORRECTIVE ACTION PLAN (CAP) AND WITHDRAWAL OF ACCREDITATION**

### **2.7.1 Corrective Action Plan (CAP) with Definitive Timelines**

When a school district has been assigned a, PROBATION, or WITHDRAWN accreditation status, the Mississippi Department of Education, in conjunction with the school district, shall develop a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) with defined timelines in which to correct the district's deficiencies. The State Board of Education implements the program of development in each district assigned a PROBATION or WITHDRAWN status in accordance with Section 37-17-6(10), *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended.

The school district is required to submit a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) within sixty (60) days. The plan must stipulate what will be done to remove the deficiencies and the time line required. The plan must be approved by the local school board as documented by official minutes and bear the signatures of the school board chairperson and district superintendent. When corrective action has been implemented to remove a citation, the school district must submit documentary evidence confirming such to the Office of Accreditation. Assigned MDE staff may conduct follow-up visits as necessary to verify corrective action and compliance.

## **2.7.2 Withdrawal of Accreditation**

If the district's deficiencies are not removed during the time specified in the Corrective Action Plan (CAP), the school district is subject to having its accredited status withdrawn by the Commission on School Accreditation in accordance with MS Code 37-17-6. The status of the district will be listed as WITHDRAWN NOT ACCREDITED, and the record of that district will continue to be maintained.

~~School districts whose accreditation has been withdrawn by the Commission on School Accreditation are prohibited from participating in all extra-curricular activities that are sanctioned by the Mississippi High School Activities Association (MHSAA) with the exception of JROTC.~~

### **2.7.2.1 Hearings**

Before requesting approval from the State Board of Education to withdraw the accredited status of a district, the **Commission on School Accreditation** conducts a hearing (See Policy 2.9 for exception.) to allow the officials of the affected district to present evidence or other reasons as to why its accreditation should not be withdrawn. {MS Code 37-17-6(11) (a)}

### **2.7.2.2 Results of Hearings**

Within forty-five (45) calendar days of the conclusion of the hearing and after consideration of the results of the hearing, the Commission on School Accreditation shall be authorized, with the approval of the State Board of Education, to withdraw the accreditation of the district and may issue a request to the Governor that a state of emergency be declared in that district in accordance with Section 37-17-6(11)(a), *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended. If the decision is made not to withdraw the accredited status of the district, a new timeline is established in the district's Corrective Action Plan (CAP).

### **2.7.2.3 Public Notice**

After a state of emergency has been declared, the Commission files a public notice at least once a week for at least three consecutive weeks in a newspaper published within the immediate or general vicinity of the affected school district in accordance with Section 37-17-6(12), *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended.

### **2.8.2.4 Access to School District Records**

School districts are required to produce necessary reports, correspondence, financial statements, and any other documents necessary for the Commission to implement this section on withdrawal of accreditation and conservatorship.

#### **2.7.2.5 Reinstatement of an Accredited Status**

Based on the recommendation from the Office of Accreditation or the State Superintendent of Education, the superintendent and school board president of a school district whose accreditation has been withdrawn may file a petition with the Commission on School Accreditation for reinstatement of accreditation to be effective on January 1 or July 1. The Commission on School Accreditation shall require all school districts that petition for reinstatement of accreditation to appear before the Commission on School Accreditation to furnish evidence satisfactory to the Commission that the school district is in compliance with all accreditation standards prior to the reinstatement of accreditation.

### **2.8 CONDITIONS OF EMERGENCY STATUS AND WITHDRAWAL OF ACCREDITATION**

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#### **2.8.1 Declaration of State of Emergency**

**The State Board of Education may request the Governor to declare a state of emergency in any school district when any of the following emergency situations occur.** Upon the declaration of the state of emergency by the Governor, the State Board of Education may take all such action for dealing with the school district as is authorized under subsection (11) or (14) of Section 37-17-6, *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended, including the withdrawal of the district's accreditation.

##### **2.8.1.1 Emergency Situation**

The State Board of Education and the Commission on School Accreditation determine that an extreme emergency situation exists in a school district which jeopardizes the safety, security or educational interests of the children enrolled in the schools in that district and such emergency situation is believed to be related to a serious violation or violations of accreditation standards or state or federal law. For purposes of this paragraph, the declarations of a state of emergency shall not be limited to those instances when a school district's impairments are related to a lack of financial resources, but also shall include serious failure to meet minimum academic standards, as evidenced by a continued pattern of poor student performance. (Section 37-17-6(11)(b), *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended)

##### **2.8.1.2 Failing School District**

A school district meets the State Board of Education's definition of a failing school district for two (2) consecutive full school years. (Section 37-17-6(11)(b), *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended)

##### **2.8.1.3 Schools At-Risk**

A school continues to be designated a School At-Risk after three (3) years of implementing a school improvement plan, or in the event that more than fifty percent (50%) of the schools within the school district are designated as Schools At-Risk in any one (1) year. (Section 37-18-7(2), *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended) (See Policy 3.4.1 for Schools At-Risk designation.)

#### **2.8.2 Penalty for the Withdrawal of Accreditation**

The following is a result of the withdrawal of accreditation by the Commission on School Accreditation:

- A school or schools within a district shall be limited to participation in no more than fifty percent (50%) of the regular season of any interscholastic activity, which shall include division/district/regional games.

- The interscholastic season schedule for a school or schools within a district shall not include the opening day of season or any type of post season participation, as determined by the Office of Accreditation, and
- Cheerleading, drill, and dance squads, speech and debate, choral music and band may participate in district or state contest, but shall not be eligible to receive ratings.

All schedule requests must be submitted in writing to the Mississippi Department of Education at least thirty (30) days prior to the beginning of the season. **The Office of Accreditation shall pre-approve all schedules and participation in interscholastic activities.** In addition to the suspension of all post season activities, the school district shall not be allowed to participate in jamborees, special games, parades, tournaments, holiday tournaments, or competitions of any nature.

Failure to comply with section 2.8.2 will result in the suspension of ALL interscholastic activities.

**Failure of a district to have its accreditation reinstated by the Commission on School Accreditation after a period of two (2) calendar years from the date of the withdrawal of accreditation, shall result in the immediate suspension of ALL interscholastic activities until the district's accreditation status is reinstated.**

**Note: Interscholastic activities include, but are not limited to, football, basketball, baseball, track and field, cross country, tennis, golf, volleyball, softball (fast pitch and slow pitch), soccer, wrestling, swimming, power lifting, bowling, archery, cheerleading, drill, and dance squads, speech and debate, choral music, and band.**

#### **2.8.23. Public Notice**

After a state of emergency has been declared, the Commission files a public notice at least once a week for at least three consecutive weeks in a newspaper published within the immediate or general vicinity of the affected school district in accordance with Section 37-17-6(12), *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended.

#### **2.8.3.4 Access to School District Records**

School districts are required to produce necessary reports, correspondence, financial statements, and any other documents necessary for the Commission to implement this section on withdrawal of accreditation and conservatorship.

#### **2.8.45 Reinstatement of an Accredited Status**

Based on the recommendation from the Office of Accreditation or the State Superintendent of Education, the superintendent and school board president of a school district whose accreditation has been withdrawn may file a petition with the Commission on School Accreditation for reinstatement of accreditation to be effective on January 1 or July 1. The Commission on School Accreditation shall require all school districts that petition for reinstatement of accreditation to appear before the Commission on School Accreditation to furnish evidence satisfactory to the Commission that the school district is in compliance with all accreditation standards prior to the reinstatement of accreditation.



### **3.0 PERFORMANCE CLASSIFICATION POLICY**

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The State Board of Education, acting through the Commission on School Accreditation, is required to establish and implement a process for accountability at the individual public school level and district level. Individual schools and districts are held accountable for student growth and performance and receive an annual School Performance Classification and District Performance Classification. (See Glossary for definitions of an attendance center and school.)

When the district establishes a new school and/or the district reconfigures the specific grades or students assigned to an existing school(s) within the district, the student achievement data used to assign school performance classifications will follow the guidelines established in the School Performance Standards and School Performance Model.

#### **3.1 ASSIGNMENT OF PERFORMANCE CLASSIFICATIONS**

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##### **3.1.1 School Performance Classification**

Information concerning school performance is reported to the Commission on an annual basis, and annual performance classifications will be assigned in the fall of each school year. Each public school that has both achievement and growth data will be assigned an annual performance classification. In addition, the Graduation Rate and the High School Completion Index (HSCI) will be included in determining the performance classification of schools with any grade configuration of 9-12. Available assessment data will be reported for those schools that do not have both achievement and growth data, but a school performance classification will not be assigned. An alternative school will not be assigned a school performance classification. (See State Board Policy 901 and 902 and the Glossary for definition of alternative school.)

##### **3.1.2 District Performance Classification**

Information concerning district performance is reported to the Commission on an annual basis, and annual performance classifications will be assigned in the fall of each school year. Each public school district will be assigned an annual performance classification based on achievement, growth, and graduation rate or High School Completion Index. A district performance level is assigned based on the performance of all students in the district i.e., the district will be treated as one K-12 school.

#### **3.2 PERFORMANCE STANDARDS**

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Performance (output or product) standards address selected components of the statewide testing program and other outcome measures related to the performance of a school. (See Performance Standards) The State Board of Education may also take into account such factors as graduation rates, dropout rates, completion rates, the extent to which the school or district employs qualified teachers in every classroom, and any other factors deemed appropriate by the State Board of Education.

#### **3.3 PERFORMANCE CLASSIFICATIONS**

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The performance classification assigned to a school or district will be determined by (a) the percentage of students who are performing at criterion levels (minimum, basic, proficient, and advanced) and (b) the degree to which student performance has improved over time (based on an expected growth value for the school). The results from the Achievement Model and the Growth Model are combined to assign performance classification as follows:

**Star School**  
**High Performing**  
**Successful**  
**Academic Watch**  
**Low Performing School**  
**At-Risk of Failing**  
**Failing**

(See State Accountability Rating System and Performance Classification Model)

A school will not receive a school performance classification if the test data have been invalidated, and the school performance classification will be noted as Test Data Invalidated. (See Appendix F.)

### **3.4 SCHOOLS AT-RISK**

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Following an analysis of school data each year, the Mississippi Department of Education shall identify those schools that are deficient in educating students and are in need of improvement in accordance with Section 37-18-3, *Mississippi Code of 1972*, as amended. This analysis shall indicate individual school performance in two areas: (a) meeting its assigned yearly growth expectation and (b) percentage of the students in the school that are proficient.

#### **3.4.1 Designation**

A school shall be identified as a School At-Risk and in need of assistance if the school:

- (a) does not meet its growth expectation and has a percentage of students functioning below grade level, as designated by the State Board of Education;
- (b) is designated as a Failing School; or
- (c) is designated as Low Performing or At-Risk of Failing for two (2) consecutive years.

#### **3.4.2 Notification**

Within fifteen (15) days after a School At-Risk has been identified, written notice shall be sent by the State Board of Education by certified mail to the school principal, the superintendent, and the chairperson of the local board of education.

#### **3.4.3 Evaluation Teams and Evaluation Report**

Within fifteen (15) days after notification, the State Board of Education shall assign an evaluation team to the school, subject to the availability of funding. The evaluation team shall be independent of the school being evaluated and may include employees of the State Department of Education. The team may include retired educators who have met certain standards and have completed all necessary training.

The evaluation team shall analyze the School At-Risk's data to determine probable areas of weakness before conducting an on-site audit. After completing the evaluation of the School At-Risk, the team shall prepare and adopt its school evaluation report, which shall be submitted to the State Superintendent of Education for approval within ninety (90) calendar days. The evaluation report shall identify any personnel who were found by the evaluation team to be in need of improvement and need to participate in a professional development plan. Evaluation instruments used to evaluate teachers, principals, superintendents or any other certified or classified personnel will be instruments that have been validated for such purposes.

**Following the State Superintendent's approval of the report, a representative of the State Superintendent and the evaluation team leader shall present the report to the principal of the School At-Risk, the school district superintendent, and school board members of the local school district. Following this presentation, the evaluation report shall be presented to the community served by the School At-Risk at an advertised public meeting.**

#### **3.4.4 School Improvement Plan**

Based on the findings of the evaluation report and the results of the public meeting, the Mississippi Department of Education and evaluation team leader shall assist the school principal and other local school officials in the development of a school improvement plan.

The school improvement plan shall be developed and approved by the principal of the School At-Risk, the superintendent of the local school district, the local school board, and a majority of the teachers of the school. If the plan is not approved, the State Board of Education may approve and implement the plan in the school.

The State Department of Education shall provide technical assistance and shall assist in identifying funding to the School At-Risk in the implementation of the school improvement plan, including the implementation of any recommended professional development plan, and the department may contract with the institutions of higher learning to provide such technical assistance. The assistance team shall collaborate with school and school district employees in the implementation and monitoring of the school improvement plan and the State Department of Education shall ensure that a report is issued monthly to the local school board and the local community-based advisory council.

A school district that has been designated as failing as defined by the State Board of Education or a district and/or a school designated below the successful level shall establish a community-based prekindergarten through higher education (P-16) council comprised of a broad spectrum of the community, including economic developers, elected officials, civic leaders, business leaders, faith-based leaders, social services, nonprofit organizations, school attendance officers, law enforcement officials, health department officials, day care providers, librarians, parents and others with the knowledge and resources that can be leveraged to build strong communities. The State Board of Education shall develop procedures for appointments to the council, which shall not be appointed solely by the school board. The council will serve as a community-led group that is inclusive, accountable and required to publicly report progress to the community as a whole.

#### **3.4.5 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR EDUCATORS**

As part of the school improvement plan for a School At-Risk, a professional development plan shall be prepared for those school administrators, teachers, or other employees who are identified by the evaluation team as needing improvement.

## **4.0 RECOGNITION AND REWARDS**

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The State Board of Education shall provide special recognition and/or rewards to individual schools or school districts meeting the highest levels of accreditation standards as defined by the State Board of Education. A school or district with a QDI in the top two ranges will be identified as meeting the highest level of accreditation standards.

### **4.1 RECOGNITION**

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Special recognition will be provided to all schools meeting the highest levels of accreditation standards. Examples of recognition include, but are not limited to the following:

- Public announcements and events;
- Special recognition of student progress and effort;
- Certificates of recognition and plaques for teachers, principals, superintendents, support and classified personnel and parents; and
- Media announcements utilizing the services of the Mississippi Educational Television.

### **4.2 REWARDS**

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Rewards may be provided for schools and school districts assigned the highest levels of performance as defined by the State Board of Education as follows:

#### **Exemptions for Schools Meeting the Highest Levels of Performance.**

Schools Meeting the Highest Levels of Performance may be exempted from citations of noncompliance with the Process Standards listed below. For specific details, refer to each process standard referenced below.

- Library Media/Organized Collection (Standard 24.1)
- Library Media Program of Service (Standard 24.2)
- High School Science Laboratory (Standard 25)
- Limit on Course Preparations (Standard 31)
  
- Student Teacher Ratios in Grades 1-4 (Standard 34.2)
- Limit of 150 Students Per Teacher in Academic Core Subjects (Standard 34.5)

#### **4.2.2 Exemptions for Districts Meeting the Highest Levels of Performance.**

School districts assigned the Highest Levels of Performance may be exempted from citations of noncompliance with the Process Standards listed below. For specific details, refer to each process standard referenced below.

- Community Involvement, Parental Communication, and Business Partnerships (Standard 18)
- Senior Preparation for Graduation Ceremonies (Standard 19.5)
- Summer School Program Requirements (Standard 19.6)
- Professional Development Plan/Program (Standard 21)
- Early Childhood Programs (kindergarten and teacher assistant) (Standard 23.1)
  
- Instructional Management System (Standard 27.1)
- Suggested Teaching Strategies, Resources, and Assessment Strategies (Standard 27.2)

#### **4.2.3 Financial Rewards**

If funds are appropriated by the legislature, Schools Meeting the Highest Levels of Performance may apply to the State Board of Education for monetary incentives to be used for selected school needs, as identified by a vote of all licensed and instructional personnel employed at the school. These incentive funds may be used for specific needs, including, but not limited to the following:

- Funding for professional development activities; staff participating in such activities will report to the school and school district about the benefits and lessons learned from such training;
- Technology needs;
- Sabbaticals for teachers or administrators, or both, to pursue additional professional development or educational enrichment;
- Paid professional leave; and
- Training for parents, including, but not limited to, curriculum, Title I, special need students, student rights and responsibility, school and community relations, and effective parenting.

### **5.0 ACCREDITATION MONITORING PROCEDURES**

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Staff in the Mississippi Department of Education continuously monitor school districts to verify compliance with applicable accreditation requirements and state and federal laws.

#### **5.1 ON-SITE EVALUATIONS**

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The State Board of Education, the State Superintendent of Education, or the Commission on School Accreditation have the authority to call for an on-site evaluation or investigation of a school district at any time. If deficiencies are found in meeting accreditation standards or state and federal laws, the superintendent is notified in writing and given thirty (30) days from the receipt of notification to provide a written response. The report of findings is filed in the current accreditation records in the Office of Accreditation.

#### **5.2 INVESTIGATIVE EVALUATIONS (COMPLAINTS AGAINST DISTRICTS)**

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All formal complaints made against schools or districts must be submitted to the Office of Accreditation in writing and bear the signature of the individual(s) filing the complaint. The written complaint shall contain specific details concerning alleged violations. When the complaint is received, the superintendent is notified in writing of the nature of the complaint and informed that the district is subject to an unannounced audit to investigate the allegations.

##### **5.2.1 Areas Over Which the Commission Has No Authority**

If the complaint addresses an area over which the Commission has no authority, the individual filing the complaint is acknowledged and the complaint is filed in the Office of Accreditation.

##### **5.2.2 Areas Over Which the Commission Does Have Authority**

If the complaint addresses an area over which the Commission does have authority, the superintendent may be notified in writing of the nature of the complaint and given 30 days to provide a written response to the allegations and to present documentation of compliance. The superintendent may also be notified that the district is subject to an unannounced audit to investigate the allegations.

**5.2.1.1** If deficiencies are found in meeting accreditation standards or state and federal laws, a report of findings is filed in the current accreditation records in the Office of Accreditation and the complainant will be notified of the findings.

**5.2.1.2** If no deficiencies are found in meeting accreditation standards or state and federal laws, the district and the complainant will be notified.

### **5.2.3 Unannounced On-Site Investigative Evaluations**

The State Board of Education, the State Superintendent of Education, or the Commission on School Accreditation have the authority to call for an on-site evaluation or investigation of a school district at any time. Procedures for conducting investigative audits are as follows:

**5.2.3.1** The auditors may arrive in the district without prior notification.

**5.2.3.2** The auditor(s) inform the superintendent of the purpose of the audit and of the procedures to be followed.

**5.2.3.3** The auditor(s) discuss procedures with the principal of the school if appropriate.

**5.2.3.4** The auditor(s) use various methods to collect the data needed to verify or discredit the complaint, including examination of official records, interviews with school personnel, and observations.

**5.2.3.5** Upon completion of the audit, the auditor(s) compile a written report that is sent to the superintendent, the chairman of the school board, and the Commission on School Accreditation.

## **5.3 SPECIAL TEST AUDITS**

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Reports regarding potential testing irregularities or test security violations are referred to the Office of Student Assessment. Such reports include statistical analyses of test data conducted after each test administration, self-reported incidents, third-party allegations regarding violations of testing requirements, and irregularities noted during test security audits. Regular test security audits may be conducted prior to, during, and following each test administration in order to promote the integrity and security of the Mississippi Assessment System. The Office of Student Assessment will report to the Office of Accreditation each testing irregularity that has been verified as a violation of a testing requirement.

**5.3.1** Self-reports or third-party allegations regarding testing irregularities may be either formal written reports (signed or unsigned) or verbal reports or complaints that may be made officially or anonymously and with or without documentary evidence.

**5.3.2** If a third-party allegation addresses an area over which the State Board of Education has no authority, the individual filing the allegation will be notified.

**5.3.3** A self-report or allegation must identify specific details concerning alleged violations of test security and/or testing irregularities in order to warrant an investigative audit.

**5.3.4** Any statistical analysis that indicates a potential testing irregularity or test security violation will be reviewed and evaluated by staff in the Office of Student Assessment. If the review and evaluation of the statistical analysis indicate that further information is required in order to resolve or confirm the testing irregularity, the Office of Student Assessment may require that a school district investigate the potential irregularity and report its findings to the Office of Student Assessment. Any verified testing irregularity is reported to the Office of Accreditation for appropriate action.

**5.3.5** Procedures for test security audits are as follows:

**5.3.5.1** The auditor may arrive at the school without prior notification.

**5.3.5.2** The auditor informs the school administrator of the purpose of the audit and of the procedures to be followed.

**5.3.5.3** The auditor requests that the superintendent be notified that a test audit is in progress.

**5.3.5.4** The auditor uses the same methods to collect data as described in policy.

**5.3.5.5** The auditor reports the audit findings to the Office of Student Assessment. If the audit findings indicate that a testing irregularity has occurred, the Office of Student Assessment will notify the district superintendent. If the response from the superintendent does not resolve the irregularity, the irregularity is reported to the Office of Accreditation for appropriate action.

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#### **5.4 SUMMER PROGRAM AUDITS**

Each school district providing educational programs during the summer is required to report summer program data, including types of instructional programs provided, staffing, and enrollment. School districts offering summer programs may be audited to verify information contained in the annual Summer School/Extended Year Report.

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#### **5.5 OTHER STATE/FEDERAL PROGRAM AUDITS/EVALUATIONS**

When audits or evaluations of other state or federal programs reveal verified noncompliance with state or federal program regulations, the incidents of noncompliance are filed with the Office of Accreditation.

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#### **5.6 ANALYSIS AND VERIFICATION OF ACCREDITATION INFORMATION**

Accreditation staff in the Mississippi Department of Education review annual personnel/accreditation information and other annual reports submitted by school districts. Staff will analyze and compare this information with any other accreditation data on record and notify responsible officials of any inconsistency in reporting or any apparent deficiency in meeting standards. Any information submitted by a school district may be verified through on-site visits. Upon request the school district must provide documentation necessary to validate compliance with accreditation requirements.

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### **6.0 HEARING AND APPEAL PROCEDURES**

All controversies involving the accreditation of schools or school districts are initially heard by a duly authorized representative of the Commission on School Accreditation before whom a complete record is made.

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## **6.1 REQUEST FOR HEARING**

The school board of a school district may request a hearing by filing written notice with the executive secretary of the Commission on School Accreditation within ten (10) calendar days of the written notification of the recommended Commission action.

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## **6.2 AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE OF THE COMMISSION**

Upon receipt of the written request for hearing, the chairman of the Commission assigns, in writing, a duly authorized representative previously appointed by the Commission to hear the controversy.

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## **6.3 HEARING PROCEDURES**

**6.3.1** The Commission's representative sets the time, place, and date for a hearing and notifies all parties of the time, place, and date of the hearing by registered or certified mail, return receipt requested. All parties may be represented by counsel at the expense of the party. The hearing is conducted in such a manner as to afford all parties a fair and reasonable opportunity to present witnesses and other evidence pertinent to the issues and to cross-examine witnesses presented by the opposing party. The Commission's representative may permit any portion of the evidence to be submitted in the form of depositions or affidavits; and in case affidavits are received, an opportunity to present counter-affidavits is provided.

**6.3.2** It is the responsibility of each party at the hearing to secure the attendance of such witness or witnesses as the party deems necessary or appropriate, and any expense connected with the attendance of such witnesses is borne by the party responsible for the attendance of the witness.

**6.3.3** In conducting the hearing, the Commission's representative is not bound by common law or by statutory rules of evidence or by technical or formal rules of procedure, provided, however, hearsay evidence, if admitted, is not the sole basis for the determination of facts by the Commission's representative.

**6.3.4** After presentation by the executive secretary of the Commission regarding recommended action and policy in support thereof, the party filing the written notice of hearing has the burden of going forward with the evidence, and at the conclusion of the hearing, the Commission's representative grants any party the opportunity to present a statement in such party's own behalf, either in person or by such party's attorney.

**6.3.5** All hearings held before the Commission's representative are recorded and transcribed by a court reporter whose fees and costs of transcription are paid by the school district involved within forty-five (45) days after having been notified of such costs and fees by the Commission. Within thirty (30) calendar days of receipt of the transcribed record of the hearing, the Commission's representative files a written recommendation to the Commission as to the resolution of the controversies. Upon consideration of the transcribed record and recommendation of its representative, the Commission makes its decision and notifies all parties in writing by certified or registered mail, return receipt requested. The decision of the Commission is final unless the school board of the school district involved elects to appeal to the State Board of Education. The school board of the school district may appeal to the State Board of Education by filing a written notice of appeal with the State Superintendent of Education within fifteen (15) calendar days of receipt of the decision of the Commission on School Accreditation.

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## **6.4 APPEAL PROCEDURES**

**6.4.1** An appeal to the State Board of Education is on the record previously made before the Commission's representative or the Commission. Upon written application, the State Board of Education may consider new factual evidence.

**6.4.2** Upon receipt of the transcript, the State Board of Education, through the State Superintendent of Education, notifies the parties involved that the transcript has been filed and that the appealing party has fifteen (15) calendar days to file any written argument not to exceed twenty-five (25) pages in length. The Commission is allowed thirty (30) calendar days from the filing of the transcript with the State Board of Education to file a responsive written argument not to exceed twenty-five (25) pages in length. Any written argument in rebuttal by the appealing party must be filed within forty (40) calendar days of the filing of the transcript. The appealing party may not exceed twenty-five (25) pages as the combined total for its original and rebuttal arguments. An original and nine (9) copies of the written argument must be provided. The State Board of Education considers all appeals within thirty (30) calendar days of the last written argument filed. The written decision of the State Board of Education is transmitted to the parties involved within fifteen (15) calendar days of its decision.

## **7.0 ANNUAL REPORT**

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By November 1 of each year, each local school district shall be required to develop and publish an annual report as prescribed by the State Board of Education (SBE). The report shall be published in a newspaper having general circulation in the county and posted on the school district's web site in a printable format. The public notice shall include information on the report's availability on the district's web site, with the web site address, and the location(s) in the school district where a copy of the report can be obtained. SBE Policy 2051